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AUTHOR Beegle, Charles W.; Ashbaugh, Carl R.
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ABSTRACT

A hard-headed look at the current condition of postindustrial man justifies the view that curriculum developers must function from standpoints different than those hitherto employed. An understanding of technology alone cannot develop the whole man. The contemporary problems of a pluralistic, postindustrial society cannot be solved within the present context of our societal institutions. Ross Mooney's Life System Model provides a meaningful framework to bring order out of the contemporary dilemma. The key functions of the Life System Model are "an organism, open and integrative, in continuous give-and-take with the environment, effecting transformations through selective fittings." The model portrays the dynamic and reciprocal qualities employed by every organism interacting with its environmental context. Curriculum development should also reflect that humans have being only as they maintain themselves in an environmental setting. Curriculum developers can no longer behave as though the school was outside the mainstream of life. The demands of the culture and needs of the individual must be the starting point in curriculum development. (Author/JG)

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THE INDIVIDUAL AS THE FOCUS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Charles W. Beegle
Carl R. Ashbaugh

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Curriculum workers seem to be forever caught in a maze of logistical concerns -- organization for learning, deployment of personnel, developing learning packages or curriculum guides, and rearranging school artifacts of yesteryear. New constructs, new thought patterns, and new language must be devised to surmount these proliferating, logistical cul-de-sacs. A laudable move in this direction would be to start asking the right kinds of questions; valuing, goal-oriented, "whyness" questions. Key questions for developers of curricula could well be represented in the following examples: What kinds of persons do educators hope the young can become, or just be? How do we decide where to begin? What kinds of experiences provide for openness in human beings? Must we accept the current educative system as a given? Are there any desirable goals toward which schooling should develop?

A sincere hard-headed look at the current condition of post-industrial man vis-a-vis his contrived milieu will provide sufficient justification for the view that curriculum developers must function from different stand-points than those hitherto employed. Man has become primarily concerned about implementing the scientific rationality. As our own culture became increasingly technological, industrial, and scientific during the last several centuries of its maturation, the center lay more and more outside the human personality; hence, a fragment of personality displaced the whole.

An understanding of technology alone cannot develop the whole man. As man's horizon expands via technology, space exploration, nuclear energy, computer science, and other extensions of knowledge unprecedented heretofore by any other age, man needs to find ways to make this knowledge serve him rather than to become enslaved by his own inventions. MacDonald's¹ advocacy of an aesthetic rationality points up an alternative for solving problems and reflecting upon man's environment. Aesthetics, as we understand MacDonald's use of the term, refers to man's capacity to deal rationally with the world on an intuitive basis. One must return to the utilization of insights which will enable him to rise above the present system of thought, to carry on the dialogue between the individual and his environments, and also foster the dialectic process within the individual himself. The existence of a growing self-consciousness resides in the minds of men, but it has generally been avoided in discussions of knowledge and education.

¹James B. MacDonald, A Transcendental Developmental Ideology of Education (Unpublished lecture, University of Rochester Curriculum Theory Conference, 1973).

The dilemma of man appears to be that he is systematically being consumed by his very successes. He seems to have grasped this tool (technology and expanded knowledge) by the blade instead of the handle. Civilization would destroy its own survival capability. As Emerson wrote, "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." This trend must be reversed. Our tools must be responsible for improvement rather than the deterioration of our life-space.

The contemporary problems of a pluralistic, post-industrial society -- strained relationships between various races, religious and socioeconomic groups; international problems of cold war and the everpresent threat of world devastation; continued threat of man's desecration of nature; engineering of human behavior; the feeling of powerlessness; the oppressive practice of one human being to another -- none of these can be solved within the present context of our societal institutions. An ontological shift from outer life to inner life must be underscored.

Ross Mooney's conceptual design, a Life System Model² provides a meaningful framework to bring order out of the contemporary dilemma of man in the postindustrial society. The key functions of the Life System Model are: "An organism, open and integrative, in continuous give-and-take with the environment, effecting transformations through selective fittings."

²Ross Mooney, "Evaluation in Higher Education, Ground, Goal, and Way To Go," MACU, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1967.

Mooney's Model portrays the dynamic and reciprocal qualities that every organism employs interacting with its environmental context. Building on these fundamental qualities, the challenge to the curriculum developer is to provide leadership in integrating this conceptual framework into curricular designs.

When considering the integrative process of the human organism in his environment, a series of salient questions arise.

1. What kinds of learning experiences should be encouraged that would provide for opening perceptual awareness?
2. What kinds of learning experiences would facilitate the process of sensitizing people to others?
3. What kinds of learning experiences would encourage development of close knit community relationships?
4. What kinds of learning encounters would encourage and facilitate religious experiences?
5. How can we facilitate the development of inner strength and power in humans?
6. What ways can knowledge be organized to expand human potential?

Openness to experience is limited to those events or stimuli of the external world that seem relevant to the inner life of the individual. More significant than his receptivity of the external world is his openness with respect to his own inner life. Such a person has fewer internal barriers against experiences: he is self accepting. Becoming more aware of how perceptions are formed is a beginning; for continued development the individual must look inward.

Curriculum development should also reflect that human existence and living things in general have being only as they maintain themselves in an environmental setting. Living organisms must continually give and take with their setting. In essence, as Mooney suggests, this is a regenerating, renewing existence. As man interacts with his environment he changes his environment, as man changes his environment, it in turn brings about change in his own behavior. Life, therefore, is creative by its very nature, fitting to a world that is in continuous change.

Curriculum developers can no longer behave as though the school was outside of the main stream of life. They must realize that the demands of culture need primary consideration in their efforts and culture originates within the individual. Thus, in yet another way, the needs of the individual must be the starting point in curriculum development. In fact, these needs ought to be derived from the learner himself as well as being determined

alone by the curriculum theorist. As Richards has expressed, "This is the main thing. This is what I care about, it is the person. This is the living vessel: person. This is what matters. This is our universe. This is the task, the job and dolor: to be born as person, to live and love as person: to dwell in the world as in a person. The living spirit, the moving form, the living word, life-death, art-life, corpus body, being, all, persons. Truly life is absent in the moment when person is eliminated. This is the urgency of my speech - for this occasion and all human occasions - to bring man into man's consciousness."